

# yields through SRI

mixed up if it rains immediately after sowing. Additionally, since there are fewer seedlings, they can be handled more efficiently. The farmers are therefore aware of the purity of the seeds, and it is easier to select good quality seeds manually, which was not always the case in the past. Lodging takes place at a later stage than when grown with conventional methods. Consequently, the earheads form properly, and it is therefore possible to spot and remove admixtures of other varieties in the field itself. Moreover, the water requirements are low, which implies that several varieties can be planted in the same season. As a result, more seeds can be produced and saved every harvest – contributing enormously to the conservation and wider dissemination of local and indigenous rice varieties.

## CIKS' Seed Bank Programme

The Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems has been working for the past 20 years to set up seed banks in villages across Tamil Nadu, as a way of promoting a more sustainable agricultural system. Our programme aims to identify important traditional seed varieties and, together with farmers and all members of a community, promote their conservation and use. We soon realised

that SRI could be a key component of these efforts.

Our work is showing how the cultivation of these varieties serves to enhance the security of small-scale and marginal farmers' livelihoods. As part of this programme, a large network of farmers is exchanging seeds and information and seeds are being stored in community-level seed banks. Members of these seed banks are using part of their land for growing different varieties. CIKS provides them with an initial supply of seeds, and we discuss the necessary steps to manage their production organically. At the end of the season, farmers have to return twice the quantity of seeds they were initially provided with. The following season, these seeds are given to other farmers. This has a multiplying effect, and over time the community can manage the seed bank independently.

Our work has shown that the establishment of a seed bank programme can help increase the availability of local or indigenous varieties of rice and many other crops. Working together with CIKS, farmers are showing that this has immediate benefits. When CIKS first started, there were only a handful of indigenous varieties left. We work in villages where farmers grow 130 varieties of paddy and 50 varieties of indigenous vegetables in their fields and experimental plots. Farmers who are producing SRI rice seeds in an organic way have reported yields of up to 5.5 tons/hectare. These are now doubly certified (as organic and also certified by the Government's Seed Certification Department), and can therefore be sold at a higher price. It is thus not surprising that SRI is described as a "very handy innovation".

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The benefits are easy to see: evaluations and group discussions. Photos: K. Vijayalakshmi / CIKS